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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/ECA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [MARR](#) [UNHCR](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: UNHCR SECURITY ADVISOR IN NORTH CAUCASUS HOPEFUL
ON INGUSHETIA SECURITY, SANGUINE ON NORTH OSSETIA

Classified By: MINISTER COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS ALICE G. WELLS,
REASONS 1.4 (B AND D).

11. (C) Summary: According to UN security officials based in Vladikavkaz, Ingushetia's new president has made a promising start as he tries to restore calm to the restive North Caucasus republic. Recent attacks on civilians in North Ossetia, meanwhile, do not appear to these observers to portend intensified violent conflict there. End Summary.

12. (SBU) In the course of a six-day trip to monitor PRM-funded projects in Chechnya and Ingushetia, Refcoord spoke at length with Boguslav Romantowski, a Polish citizen who is Field Security Advisor at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Vladikavkaz. UNHCR moved its regional headquarters to North Ossetia in 2007, following the firing of mortars at its office in Nazran, then capital of the neighboring republic of Ingushetiya. Maintaining adequate security has continued to pose a major challenge to UN staff in the North Caucasus, as roadside bomb and IED explosions, along with targeted killings by both security forces and rebels, continue daily. While a decade has passed since the kidnapping by Chechen guerrillas of an earlier UNHCR Head of Office, Vincent Cochetel (currently Deputy Director of International Protection Services at UNHCR in Geneva), political violence remains a real risk to residents of, and visitors to, the Northeastern Caucasus republics -- (from west to east) North Ossetia, Ingushetiya, Chechnya, and Dagestan.

Cautious optimism for Ingushetiya

13. (C) Romantowski described Lt. Col. Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, who in October 2008 succeeded the highly unpopular Murat Zyazikov as Ingush president, as a straight-talking military man, refreshingly different from a typical politician. The republic's residents admire Yevkurov's bravery for his willingness, in his first months in office, to walk city streets in order to visit his constituents in their homes and businesses. Romantowski's local security assistant, Vladimir Petrov, asserted that Yevkurov's military background prepared him well to take control and improve the functioning of Ingushetiya's police, who under Zyazikov had been notorious for their incompetence. He added that the number of vendetta attacks has fallen in Ingushetiya since Yevkurov took office, an improvement that may be ascribed to the new president having brought opposition leaders into his administration. On the other hand, Petrov conceded, the overall security situation in Ingushetiya has not yet improved. (Note: On her own travels through the republic, Refcoord observed morning military patrols along roadsides, with soldiers searching for explosives that might have been planted overnight, and officers at checkpoints wearing ski masks so as to avoid identification by potential rebel assassins. End

Note.)

¶4. (C) Romantowski stated that Ingushetiya is today definitely more dangerous than Chechnya, even though the GOR insists on tighter security for official visitors to the latter republic. The multi-vehicle convoy of police and military laid on for travel in Chechnya is primarily to control foreign officials' movements there rather than to protect us, he remarked. Petrov added that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has neutralized the radical Islamist threat in Chechnya by showing great commitment of his own to Islamic symbolism and devotion (e.g., by building a giant mosque in Grozniy and requiring women to wear headscarves in government buildings), whereas Muslim extremists remain a significant factor in the security situation in Ingushetia.

¶5. (C) Contrary to official statements, Romantowski advised, the blast that killed eight people at a Nazran bailiff's office January 13 was likely not caused by a gas leak. Unusually for a terrorist incident in the region, no group has claimed responsibility for the explosion, however. Local sources had told UN security staff that the damage caused was inconsistent with what would be expected from a heating system mishap. (Note: An NGO official remarked to Refcood in passing that the regional bailiff's service was notoriously abusive toward litigants, such that many individuals might have possessed a motive for the deadly attack. End Note.)

Calm in North Ossetia

¶5. (C) Though all UNHCR North Caucasus officials and numerous expatriate NGO staff live in Vladikavkaz, Romantowski appeared unfazed by the recent murders of the city's current and previous mayors and the suicide bombing of a taxi mini van that killed 12 people November 6. The assassinations appear to have been linked to the executives' involvement in a financial dispute over illegal municipal land sales, while the motive for the attack on urban commuters is still unclear three months after it occurred. Remarkably, the city remained calm during last summer's influx of escapees from the conflict in South Ossetia. Though North Ossetia faced absorbing the majority of the over 30,000 South Ossetians who fled to Russia, Vladikavkaz functioned as normal. Not that the war was invisible: Cossacks passing through on their way to join the battle drank heavily in city bars. Fighters returning from the front sometimes brought loot, including trophy Georgian automobiles that they repainted. Five months later, the atmosphere in Vladikavkaz remains calm, Romantowski averred, despite the recent attacks that made world news. Most North Ossetians do not feel themselves to be the intended targets, he reasoned.

Comment

¶6. (C) Yevkurov has moved deliberately to build confidence among both the Ingush people and outside observers that if things in their republic do not get markedly better, at least they will not, on his watch, deteriorate. Not everyone is yet at ease, however. Meeting with high school student beneficiaries of PRM programs in Troitskaya, an Ingush town that hosts a substantial Chechen IDP population, Refcood asked if these adolescents believed they faced any challenges unique to their part of the world. "Yes," one boy replied, having first politely raised his hand. "We can't go out at night without risking being killed."
BEYRLE